



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 110th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 153

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2007

No. 38

House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. GIFFORDS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

Washington, DC, March 6, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable GABRIELLE GIFFORDS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

WE MUST TAKE CARE OF OUR VETERANS

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, historically, the month of March has been a time when we greet representatives of our Nation's veterans who come to Capitol Hill to advocate on behalf of their fellow veterans. This year, however, it is hard not to feel a sense of shame as we see the veterans spreading out over Capitol Hill again carrying their message. Sadly, as has been shown in our hearings and on the front pages of our papers around the country in countless news accounts, Congress

has done a poor job of listening to their needs in the past, and we are seeing more than ever the need to address those concerns directly.

I haven't supported the reckless treatment of our veterans. I have supported our Democratic efforts when we were in the minority, fighting for appropriate funding and equipment. But we can only go so far with an administration that has been focused on its own version of reality and its own priorities very much at variance with our veterans, and that have been enabled for the last 6 years by a Republican leadership with their own sense of priorities.

We have seen and heard from our veterans about the long waits, the red tape. It is not, however, the fault of some faceless bureaucracy as implied by Vice President CHENEY yesterday, because there are countless dedicated men and women who still provide good care for most of our veterans and who want to do better. It is an administration and its policies and the people that they have put in charge that must change. And, of course, it is the war in Iraq, itself.

It is not just a question of money. We have given plenty of money to this administration, more in fact than they have asked for. We are spending more on our military and veterans than the entire rest of the world combined. But because of the mismanagement, we have been giving too much to the wrong people to do the wrong things, dealing with the wrong priorities.

I just left a budget hearing. We are still looking at an administration that wants to lavish billions on missile defense and Cold War era weapons, while having proposals that would cut programs for traumatic brain injury and, according to the Congressional Budget Office, underfund our veterans' needs by some \$3.4 billion over the next 5 years.

We are dealing with an administration that has put political operatives

in sensitive positions. The head of the Veterans Administration, for example, is a former head of the Republican Party who was surprised about the budget problems, whose administration forgot about the thousands of returning veterans that were going to need more services, who was baffled by the security lapses in the veterans' files on VA computers.

This last week, I hope the tide is turning. I hope that finally the spotlight that has been focused on amplifying the concerns that a number of us have heard and have talked about in the past, will make a case that will not be possible for this administration to ignore any longer.

Mr. Vice President, it's not just the Federal bureaucracy. It's your bureaucracy after 6 years. It's your budgets, your priorities, your leaders who are failing.

I am confident that this Congress will be able to turn the tide so next year, when our veterans' representatives are here on Capitol Hill, we are not going to feel guilty; that we will be able to look our young men and women who are in the service today and the people who are recovering from their service overseas in the eye, knowing that we, this Congress, the administration and the American people have done all we could for them.

FIRST COOLING, NOW WARMING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My colleagues, here is a quote from a Newsweek article: "There are ominous signs that the Earth's weather patterns have begun to change dramatically, and that these changes may portend a drastic decline in food production, with

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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